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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the relevance of the neo-Marxist perspective (critical theory) to educational theory and practice, with particular emphasis on the implications of this perspective for educational researchers and educators involved in teacher education programs. For purposes of comparative analysis, it also provides a brief overview of basic assumptions of traditional western (functional, positivist) approaches to the analysis of educational phenomena. Major terms are defined as follows: (1) The critical perspective is a theoretical tradition based on Karl Marx's insights into the working of the social world; (2) relational analysis is a Marxist concept that suggests that social phenomena are best understood when examined in relation to their ties to the larger set of institutions and institutional arrangements in society; and (3) cultural deprivation refers to the whole set of social, environmental, cultural, and economic circumstances which surround pupils from impoverished backgrounds and contribute toward failure to achieve in school. The hypothesis is that educational researchers will be able to broaden their understanding of educational phenomena if they are familiar with the hidden biases, assumptions, and limitations, as well as traditional theoretical perspectives. Educational issues discussed from the point of view of both traditional and Marxist approaches include the relationship between schooling and social inequality, consideration of the type of knowledge which is included in the curriculum, and connections between cultural power and the control of economic and social power. Conclusions are that scholars influenced by the Marxian tradition can contribute to educational research by making researchers more sensitive to the importance of the structure and form of curriculum in transmitting ideology, can help teacher educators understand the significance of selective traditions, and can help prospective teachers see connections between what occurs in classrooms and the larger problems of social injustice and inequality. (DB)

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Critical Theory and Everyday Educational Life

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Introduction

This paper contains some of the reflections of one who was introduced to the "critical" or neo-Marxist perspective on education as a graduate student. Because this "introduction" is still incomplete, the following remarks should not be taken as a definitive summary of what this perspective has to say about our work as educators and scholars. Instead, they should be viewed as the personal, still evolving thoughts of one who believes in the efficacy of many of the theoretical, moral, and ethical dimensions of this world view, recognizes its limitations, and is searching for ways to make it more relevant to everyday educational life.

Before beginning it is necessary and important that I clarify certain matters of definition. While several crucial aspects of the perspective to be developed below are derived from the Marxist tradition, I prefer at this time not to be labeled a Marxist. My reasons are several. The first reason is drawn from the history of the curriculum field which contains many examples of those who uncritically appropriated traditions from other disciplines without having first mastered the intricacies of those traditions and who were consequently not fully aware of all of the ramifications and implications of adapting, for example, Taylorism from business organization and systems management approaches from engineering to education.[1] Because Marxism is a general approach to the study of the social world and because looking at education from this perspective does not directly affect the lives of children, these problems are perhaps less pressing in regard to applying some of its perspectives to education than is the case in the examples just cited. Nevertheless, because my knowledge of the Marxist tradition comes primarily from reading secondary sources I am reluctant to call myself a Marxist despite my belief in the efficacy of some basic Marxist concepts.

Another source of my reticence to be labeled a Marxist is more pragmatic. My friend and teacher Michael Apple has often remarked that to be labeled a Marxist is, in many quarters, grounds for dismissal, to not be taken seriously. While in certain respects the climate within our field has improved demonstrably in recent years regarding the acceptability of Marxist ideas--the number of presentations at this convention incorporating the Marxist perspective and willingness of journals such as Harvard Educational Review to publish Marxist-oriented scholarship are but two examples of this fact--the country's turn rightward and the hardline mentality of the Reagan administration does not bode well. The paranoic fears engendered by those like the State Department spokesperson who commented recently on the threat posed by a "Marxist takeover" in Nicaragua and El Salvador suggests to the public at large that there are no differences between Marxists in those beleaguered Central American states, and the neanderthals in the Kremlin (not to mention the differences between the Khmer Rouge and French and Italian Eurocommunists or more academically-oriented Marxists like Bowles and Gintis or Raymond Williams.) My point here is subtle yet significant as I believe it possible, and necessary, to affiliate with positive aspects of the tradition while resisting and criticizing its more lamentable tendencies.

A final point speaks less to the question of affiliation and identification than it does to the problem faced by those wishing to develop wider interest in applying Marx's profound insights into the working of the social world to education. This point concerns the appalling ignorance of American educators and social scientists about the Marxist tradition, an ignorance that contrasts with Marxism's long history in the European intellectual tradition. One need not believe that class conflict is the engine of history, or that the mode of production automatically determines all culture and politics, to recognize the power of Marx's insight that social phenonena can

only be comprehended when studied historically and in relation to the larger nexus of relations of which they are a part. I do not believe it an overstatement to claim that Marx's contribution to the study of the social world is comparable to that made by Freud to human psychology and Einstein to physics. To dismiss Marx and his ideas, as is all too often done in this country, because of the abuses of those who acted in his name[2] is as foolish as rejecting Freud because of those who choose to see phalluses and Oedipal conflict lurking at every corner, or dismissing of Einstein because his work laid the foundation for the atomic bomb. Indeed, the disdain with which most American academics view Marxism speaks, in Apple's (1979) words, "more about the fear ladened past of American society than it does about the merits of the (all too often unexplored) tradition of critical analysis" (p. 131).

What precisely is this unexplored tradition, and what does it offer to those committed to the improvement of both the quality of discourse about education and the day-to-day lives of American school children? In addressing this question, I shall retrace some of the steps that have led me to this forum and comment as well on what I see as the general applicability of critical analysis to educational discourse. I will also touch upon its relevance to the study of children's literature, my own particular area of interest.

Relational Analysis

One of the pivotal concepts of critical analysis has been termed relational analysis. It stresses the necessity of seeing social phenomena in terms of their ties or relations to the larger set of institutions and institutional arrangements in society.[3] According to this view, schools are but one institution in a complex network and full understanding of schooling becomes possible only when it is examined within this larger institutional framework. As Apple (1979) put it:

> As far as is possible, we need to place the knowledge that we teach, the social relations that dominate classrooms, the school as a mechanism of cultural and economic preservation and distribution and finally, ourselves as people who work in these institutions, back into the context in which they all reside. All of these things are subject to an interpretation of their respective places in a complex, stratified, and unequal society. (p. 3)

The importance of understanding social phenomena within multiple contexts is fundamental to relational analysis. School activities, norms, values, definitions, instructional materials, etc., become the subject of investigations seeking to relate them to contexts beginning with the classroom itself and moving outward to the wider social context. The power and promise of ethnographic and or phenomenologically based research, for example, are that they have attempted to see classroom meanings as social constructions, products of classroom interaction and negotiation. The limitation of these exciting and promising modes of research is that they often stop at the classroom door. In so doing they fail to see how classroom events are shaped and constrained by the classroom itself, its surrounding community, and wider social order.[4]

Relational analysis derives from one of the most basic Marxist concepts; one that has long been the subject of caricature by those outside of the Marxist tradition, and of debate and controversy among those within it. I refer here to Marx's conceptualization of the relations between a society's economic system or "mode of production" (sometimes referred to as the "base") and its various social, political, and cultural institutions (the "superstructure"). The source of controversy has concerned the degree to which the former (the base) "determines," "prefigures," or otherwise influences the latter. This controversy is apparent within educational circles in regard to the heated debates over Bowles and Gintis (1976) "correspondence theory" as well as virtually every field of study influenced by Marxism.[5] Lewis Coser (1980) commented recently on this basic Marxist idea:

> Social living, according to Marx, can only be understood in terms of historical specificity. Such stress on historical specificity is in fact another major hallmark of his approach to the data on human existence. Marx was concerned with the ways in which particular positions in specific social structures that arise from particular modes of production tend to shape the social experience of their incumbents....
>
> It was Marx who was the first to explore systematically and in some analytical depth the connections between sets of ideas and the concrete social structure in which they emerged. Ideas, Marx maintained, must be traced to the life conditions and the historical and social situation of those who uphold them (pp. 336, 338).

One of the strengths of the relational mode of analysis is its ability to reveal the hidden assumptions and biases of other approaches, thus allowing us to see things in a different, more critical light. To illustrate this point I shall briefly consider how sociologists of education working within what Wexler (1976) termed the "Progressive paradigm" have conceptualized one of the central questions of their field, the relation between schooling and social inequality.

Being firmly grounded in liberal assumptions about American society,[6] those working within this paradigm believed that schools could be used to foster equality and improve society. This faith in the potential of schools led researchers to seek an explanation of the persistently documented differential achievement of students from different social backgrounds. That is, an attempt was made to explain why children from lower socioeconomic groups lagged behind their more advantaged counterparts in the various measures of school achievement.

An important thrust of this research became the delineation and specification of the characteristics of the "disadvantaged" learners that were said to inhibit their acquisition of school knowledge. Theories about language claiming in effect that speakers of non-standard forms such as black English were language impoverished and otherwise culturally deprived were put forward.

This "cultural deprivation" was believed to have resulted in the arrest of these children's cognitive development, and to have led to their failure to achieve in school. These theories also became the rationale behind such well-intended federal intervention programs as Head Start. The failure of these programs to deliver all that their proponents had promised led Jensen, Shockley, and others to resurrect the genetic inferiority thesis to explain differential achievement.[7]

In examining this controversy it is important to note that advocates of both the cultural deprivation and genetic inferiority theses limited their search for explanations of differential achievement to characteristics of learners themselves, a classic example of what Ryan (1971) referred to as "blaming the victim." Little attempt was made to consider either the role of teachers and schools in this process or to explore the social basis for the concept of academic achievement that had been accepted as a neutral and objective scientific construct. Research on the academic achievement of different social groups consisted primarily of attempts to measure the ability of these groups to master a given body of knowledge. Because researchers had an abiding faith in the ability of science to arbitrate disputes over "what knowledge should be included in the school curriculum" (Wexler, 1976, p. 46) questions about the social bases of knowledge were never seriously considered. Some of these questions, as well as other unexamined assumptions, were raised by Wexler in his discussion of the relation between the many "educability" studies and the issue of school knowledge:

> Just as research about equality and education has generally accepted the societal structure of inequality as given and studied instead the determinants of differences in individual rewards, the main body of research about school knowledge or culture avoids analysis of the collective structure--here the cognitive culture structure--of schooling. Rather, it focuses on individual differences in the successful acquisition of school knowledge....In other words, seeing the acquisition of knowledge as only another occasion for competition and success makes the student's relative ranking on

> standardized achievement tests rather than the actual content of learning the object of sociological attention. The crucial research issue then becomes where the student stands relative to others, rather than the ground they all stand on. In the study of equality and schooling, this has led...to an emphasis on individual success and mobility and to the relative neglect of the relationship between education and the overall structure of socially patterned inequality. In the study of school knowledge, individual academic success, that is, ranking on some achievement scale, becomes more important than the content of school knowledge and its basis in collective social life (p. 47).

Wexler's formulation of these issues clearly complicates and extends the scope of investigation. Where the previously discussed approach looked no further than the supposed differences or defects of the child, Wexler would have us look at the assumptions undergirding the very concept of achievement as well as at the knowledge achievement tests purportedly measure. This asking of prior questions that seek to connect educational phenomena to the wider social structure is basic to the relational, critical approach. In other words, before inquiring into the undeniably important issue of school success or failure, one is compelled to pose questions about whose knowledge, language forms, and dialects are legitimated and are taught in schools, why they are taught and to which groups they are taught. Finally, and more globally, what are the connections between cultural power and the control of economic and social power in the society?

While space does not permit elaboration of all of these issues, it is sufficient to note that those who take the more critically oriented position argue for the need of a "sociology of school knowledge." They see a fundamental relation between the knowledge, values, norms, and propensities legitimated and taught in schools and the wider distribution of power and resources in society. From this perspective one sees social origins affecting academic achievement not simply because "cultural deprivation" limits the cognitive development of the poor and the ethnically diverse minorities, but rather

because the criteria of success, the language forms, cultural styles--"cultural capital" in Bourdieu's (1976) terms--are essentially those of the white, middle class. That is, because schools tend to reflect the value systems of society's dominant groups, those children already possessing the "right cultural capital" are in a position of unquestioned advantage in the competition for academic success and rewards. Further, because schools reward abilities that only a limited segment of the population possess (i.e., the ability to speak standard English), it is argued that inequality is actually built into the generally unquestioned culture of the school. These facts lead to the conclusion that rather than serving as engines of social mobility, schools actually function to legitimize and reproduce the structure of social inequality. To use the often-used term, schools are agents of cultural reproduction.

It is not my intention here to restate positions that are better stated elsewhere.[8] Rather, my hope is to demonstrate how radically different our interpretation of the same social phenomenon can be when alternative questions and assumptions are utilized to frame the analysis. Of course, a common response to this exposition is to ask what all this "political stuff" has to do with questions that are best left to more "scientific" approaches to education? This may appear to be a serious issue, one that poses a dilemma for those of us wishing to bring the critical perspective to bear on everyday life. Upon closer inspection, however, the claim that the critical perspective interjects politics into issues that are best left to those taking a "more scientific" view of things is found to be a non-issue. A significant portion of Professor Apple's (1979, pp. 123-152) early work sought, successfully I believe, to refute the notion that educational research can ever be seen as a neutral, purely scientific endeavor. The questions we ask, the categories

and assumptions we bring to bear, involve us, despite our best wishes, in what must be seen as an inherently political act, something the example just cited was intended to make apparent. It is a sad commentary on our field that, so many years after Mills (1959) and Gouldner (1970) demolished claims for a value-free social science, such claims still persist. A fundamental issue then is whether or not we are willing to admit that our work as educators and researchers is political. Given the persistent inability of our schools to meet the needs of all of our students, often despite many of our most sincere efforts and given the social costs of that failure, we need to ask ourselves whether the proper response to this situation needs to be, at least in part, political. It is disheartening and astounding to me that so many still cling to the belief that the solution is to refine even further our ability to state objectives in behavioral terms, or to find the right competencies to teach prospective teachers, or to increase the utilization of behavior modification. One of the saddest commentaries on the state of our field is the readiness with which so many of our colleagues, at both the university and public school level, embrace behavior modification without even considering the ethical, moral, and political issues involved.

Politics, Power, and School Knowledge

That teaching and research are unavoidably concerned with political, moral, and ethical issues can be further illustrated by looking at some of the issues and concerns that are central to my own interest in children's literature. This case-in-point also serves two additional functions. First, it provides a more specific application of the general claims made earlier about the relations and connections between what gets into the curriculum and the distribution of power and resources in society. It also demonstrates how a more relational analysis can permit a fuller understanding of complex issues.

One of the most visible and pressing controversies of the past decade has been in regard to the selection of instructional materials such as textbooks and tradebook literature. While disputes about curriculum content are hardly new, those that have raged over materials deemed racist and/or sexist are particularly interesting examples that can be viewed fruitfully within the framework of a critical sociology of school knowledge.

Historically, pressure groups of various kinds have sought to influence the kinds of instructional materials made available to children in classrooms. Accounts of these controversies by Blanshard (1955) and Nelson and Roberts (1963) indicate that most of the pressure in this century has come from ultra-conservative groups seeking "to have the schools reflect its own prejudices" (Blanshard, p. 86). More recently, however, groups representing women and various racial and ethnic minorities have protested the historic minimalization, omission, and distortion of their history and culture in a wide array of curricular materials. Organizations such as the Council on Interracial Books for Children (C.I.B.C.) have questioned the appropriateness of continuing to use the many racist and sexist books currently available in American classrooms. This, and their concommitant demand that the history and culture of women and minorities be more equitably treated in curricular materials has led to charges that they seek to censor, as surely as do their more conservative counterparts. C.I.B.C. does, however, claim that it is erroneous to equate their protests with the more "traditional" objections about profane language, the realistic treatment of sex, drugs, and inner city life. While recognizing the danger of giving any individual or group the right to prescribe and proscribe the materials to be utilized in classrooms, C.I.B.C. insists that materials which insult and demean an individual's "unalterable state of being" (i.e., their race or sex) should not be defended in the name of in-

tellectual freedom (C.I.B.C., 1976, p. 4). Robert Moore (1977), speaking for C.I.B.C., suggested that in situations where materials are purchased with public funds, and students are compelled to study from them, the equal protection of clause of the Fourteenth Amendment demands that the state assume responsibility to assure that textbooks "do not infringe on the human rights and freedom of any student" (p. 4). Moore's position was that in certain situations the need to protect children from potentially harmful materials is guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment and takes precedence over any supposed claims under the First Amendment.

Debates about the best way to balance these competing claims are obviously complex and beyond the scope of this paper. What is germane to this presentation is the fact that considerable insight into this controversy can be gained when one views it from the perspective of the sociology of school knowledge, a thesis I have argued at length in a previous paper (Taxel, 1978/79). I will, however, provide a brief overview of the relevance of that perspective to this issue.

Earlier, I noted that a key assumption of the sociology of school knowledge states that the knowledge, values, and norms taught in schools are related, in a basic and fundamental way, to the distribution of power and resources in society. Young (1971), for example, characterized the relation between school knowledge, and culture in general, as one in which those wielding the greatest power in society seek to define both what is taken as knowledge and its accessibility to different groups. In a similar vein, Bourdieu (1971) claimed that culture is "an instrument of power...legitimating the established order" (p. 1255) because powerful groups are able to define their own language, culture, values, and history as the only legitimate ones. Raymond Williams (1977) also addressed the vital role of culture in

providing idealogical support for the existing social order when he discussed the concept of selective tradition, "an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification." A crucial point about selective traditions is their radical selectivity, that given "a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis and certain other meanings and practices are excluded" (p. 115). The results of this selection process are then presented and passed off as the tradition, the significant past. Williams argued that selective traditions provide a society with a diffuse and accepted sense of tradition, culture, and history that constitutes "a sense of predisposed continuity...which offers historical and cultural ratification of a contemporary order" (pp. 115-116).

This discussion of concepts and ideas basic to the sociology of school knowledge seeks to make clear the folly of viewing educational knowledge--and culture in general--as a body of ideologically neutral facts and information, something many of those working within the Progressive paradigm have often assumed. This framework compels us to see that groups like C.I.B.C. are not simply misguided individuals seeking to have schools "reflect their own prejudices." These disputes about curricular content involve more than the undeniable need to shield our schools from self-righteous individuals and groups who would set themselves up as the guardians of our children's morality. They go, directly to the issue of how our society defines its past, present, and future and the role of different groups in that past, present, and future. When instructional materials consistently minimize, deny, or distort the experiences of women and minorities, they not only reflect the historic condition of those groups but also provide legitimacy to a social

order that perpetuates their state of relative powerlessness. The crucial point here is that there is a relation between the historic condition of women and minorities and the well documented omission and distortion of their history and culture in instructional materials such as children's literature. My own study of the depiction of the Revolutionary War in children's fiction (Taxel, 1980), for example, documented the fact that the overwhelming majority of authors writing during the seventy-six years covered by my sample either present blacks in a grotesquely stereotyped fashion or eliminate them altogether. Such a presentation helps to perpetuate an insidious cultural stereotype and minimizes the considerable black participation in the Revolution. It also obscures the extent to which Americans at the time of the Revolution were aware of what Morgan (1976) termed, "the central paradox of American history," the fact that the struggle for American independence occurred at the very time that slavery was being institutionalized in many colonies. Because children who read many of these books get a selective and partial interpretation of the Revolution, they can be mislead into thinking that the Revolution resulted in the creation of a near perfect society, free of contradictions and flaws. In addition, children who read these books today and find blacks presented either as stereotypes, or not at all, may perceive, whether consciously or unconsciously, this erroneous presentation as confirming their own budding prejudices. It may also lend support to the belief that the absense of blacks from meaningful participation in public life is acceptable, and is the way things have always been and should be.[9]

The foregoing discussion stressed the fact that deliberations about curriculum content are unavoidably political in nature. Questions about whose history and culture get taught in schools not only go to the heart of a society's definition and perception of itself, but also raises questions about its reproduction. While many outside of the Marxist tradition have recognized these points,

those working within it--i.e., Apple, Bourdieu, Bernstein, and Young--have contributed significantly to our understanding of how knowledge creation, transmission, and distribution serve social functions that may in fact belie the best intentions of many teachers, administrators, and researchers. This renewed appreciation of education's political and reproductive functions is one of the most significant contributions of those working within the Marxist tradition.

The Analysis of "Form" and the Question of Determination

Another important contribution of those influenced by the Marxist tradition has been to heighten our sensitivity to the importance of curricula and literary form, or structure, as a transmitter of ideology.[10] Marxist literary historian George Lucacs, for example, claimed that "the true bearers of ideology in art are the very forms, rather than the abstractable content of the work itself" (quoted by Eagleton, 1976, p. 24). More recently literary critic Terry Eagleton spoke to this point when stating that the forms of literary works "are forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world; and as such they have a relation to the dominant way of seeing the world which is the social mentality or ideology of an age" (p. 6).

Emphasis on form can illuminate not only the qualitites and characteristics of works of art but also of classroom processes. Bowles and Gintis' (1976) "correspondence theory" suggested, for example, that the form of classroom interactions--i.e., the "social relations of the classroom" or the "hidden curriculum"--reproduce the social relations required by the workplace, the "social relations of production." While Bowles and Gintis' thesis can be criticized because it is both overly reductive and fails to consider the role of curricular content in the reproductive process, their emphasis on the form of classroom interactions, and its connection to the wider social structure, is a valuable contribution to our understanding of schooling.

My previously discussed analysis of children's Revolutionary fiction also examined the form, or the narrative structure, of the novels. This aspect of my study was modeled after Wright's (1975) study of the evolution of the structure of Western films. Wright uncovered a correspondence between the structure of the Western and changes in the structure of the dominant institutions of society (p. 14). He explained, for example, how the differences between what he termed the "classical" and the "professional" Westerns reflect the shift from a market to a corporate economy. His thesis is similar to the correspondence theory of Bowles and Gintis and is another example of the base, superstructure relation discussed at the outset of the paper. I believe this formulation oversimplifies a complex process, but despite this note of caution, my own analysis of the children's novels revealed some striking parallels to Wright's study, parallels that could not possibly be attributed to coincidence. The remarkable similarities between these two analyses clearly suggests that historically rooted attitudes, social values, and ideologies make their way into and are reflected in imaginative works such as children's fiction and Western films though I would stop short of claiming that the content and form of these works are "determined" by economic and historical forces. The relations and connections between a society and such cultural forms as Western films and children's novels, are far too complex to be reduced to a simple reflection of a given "mode of production."[11] Griswold's (1981) study, for example, explored some of the dimensions of the "reflection theory of literature" by comparing late 19th and early 20th century French and American popular novels. Her analysis dramatically demonstrated on how these novels were influenced by the passage of a seemingly inconsequential copyright law. Similarly Plotke (1981), in a discussion of recent socioeconomic and political events in the United States,

argued strongly against reading current political developments only as "a specific setting in which class actors respond to the workings of an economic machine" (p. 22).

Debates about the determinations of social, cultural, and political phenomena are being hotly contested today and obviously will not be resolved either in this forum or in the near future. At present, however, it seems evident that an adequate analysis of such phenomena, be they children's novels, Western films, or the process of schooling itself, must incorporate a wider range of factors than is generally the case. My future research, for example, will be extended to consider how such heretofore, neglected factors as the intentions of authors and changes in publishing, marketing, and distribution contribute to the shaping of both content and form in children's literature. It is important to stress that this increased appreciation of the complexity of the process of what Goldmann (1976) referred to as "cultural creation" remains sensitive to the profound ways in which historically specific organizations and institutions shape all of human activity. Life in an advanced industrial, capitalist economy <u>does</u> cause us to enter into specific kinds of relationships with each other. It also influences our work, art, and politics--in short, all areas of human endeavor. We think, organize, and perceive our world, at least in part, because of the very basic ways in which our society is organized. Precisely how, and to what degree this basic institutional matrix "determines" our existence I cannot say. The challenge confronting those who would enliven educational discourse with Marx's insights into the social world is to maintain his sensitivity to the historic specificity of human life without reducing it to a mere reflection of inexorable, uncontrollable, impersonal "forces of production" that would ultimately deny us the power to shape and influence our world.[12]

Theory and Practice in Education

Thus far my remarks have been limited to discussing how the critical or neo-Marxist perspective has influenced my perception of key issues confronting the past, present, and future of American schools. I have said little of its impact on my day-to-day life as a teacher of children's literature and language arts courses and as an occasional supervisor of preservice teachers. My lack of discussion about these matters, indeed the very fact that I have chosen to discuss them last, is perhaps a measure of the difficulty of developing a meaningful educational "praxis"--that elusive goal of uniting theory and practice sought not only by Marx but by John Dewey as well. It is to those matters that I now turn.

Those involved in teacher education have long discussed the need to bring theory and practice closer together. That the debate continues so many years after Dewey's (1964) classic essay on the subject is a measure of the elusiveness of the goal. One of the challenges confronting those seeking to interject theory into courses directed toward practitioners is to avoid being accused of any or all of the following: of being cloistered for too long in the "ivory tower," of being "too philosophical"or worst of all, of being insensitive to the day-to-day concerns of those who teach children in the "real world." One can, of course, hurl the counter charge that most preservice and inservice students resist theorizing and are unconcerned with matters that do not have a direct bearing on their day-to-day concerns. Recognizing that there is a measure of truth in both sets of charges is perhaps an important first step toward positive action but it really does not bring us much closer to our still elusive goal.

In the present instance the difficulty is compounded by the very nature of the theories under discussion. It is one thing to discuss how Piaget's

theory of cognitive development or a theory of language acquisition can inform the development of a language arts curriculum and quite another to raise questions about power, politics, racism, sexism, injustice, and oppression. While many students do in fact agree that much is wrong with both schools and the world in general, they also feel they alone can do nothing about it. And besides, they ask, how will all of this help them teach Jane and Johnny how to read, write, and compute?

This problem of bringing theory and practice closer together is further complicated by several other factors. First is our socially conditioned habit of seeing social phenomena as discrete entities having little or no relation to one another. Commentations as diverse as Postman (1980) and Williams (1974), for example, have noted that the very way in which television news is presented fosters a vision of the world that is so fragmented that one news item (i.e., persistent and rising unemployment) appears to have little or no relation to another (i.e., rising crime). Finally, the overtly reactionary rhetoric and actions of an administration seemingly bent on legitimating a national ethos of callous, selfish, insensitivity to the plight of others has made the problems of helping students see the connections between what occurs in classrooms and the larger problems of social injustice and inequality appear insurmountable.

I trust no one is expecting this rather gloomy appraisal to be shattered by some startling revelation of the way out of the quandry. Unfortunately we live in an age when even many children's stories no longer end "happily ever after." Despite the pessimistic tone of these remarks, I am not without hope, for I feel I am beginning to see at least some issues with a measure of clarity and certainty.

I believe first of all that our larger social problems are structural in nature and are therefore not correctable by liberal band-aids, tinkering, and fine tuning although that approach is infinitely preferable to and more humane than the sort of medicine being prescribed today in Washington. Poverty, unemployment, racism, and sexism are inherent to our social system and can only be corrected by "major surgery," so to speak.

More pertinent to the issue at hand is recognizing that the task of assisting students to see relations between theory and practice and between classroom events and those occurring in society at large are to some extent problems of effective teaching. Is it not hypocritical and indefensible to demand that our students gear their teaching to the diverse needs of the children they teach if we do not do the same? Students <u>can</u> be led to an understanding of the moral and ethical nature of teaching <u>only</u> if we ourselves, by our actions as well as our words, treat it as such. They <u>can</u> be assisted to see beyond the dominant efficiency model of education if they understand the historic roots of that model and if feasible alternatives are presented. Students can also see the threat this model poses to their own autonomy as professionals if they understand how many of the new curriculum materials "de-skill" teachers by taking the responsibility for curricular decision making out of their hands. When alternate approaches to classroom management and discipline are presented, students <u>are</u> receptive to arguments about the ethics and morality of behavior modification programs and are sensitive to the fact that their primary use is to subdue and control the very students whose needs and interests schools are most often unable to accommodate.[13] Finally, students can begin to understand the significance of selective traditions, and the fact that literature serves political functions, when they encounter alternative interpretations of literature and history.

This last point became apparent recently in one of my children's literature classes. In these courses I always talk about the problems of stereotyping and bias in literature. While the response to these presentations was often gratifying--a few students always remarked that "I'd never thought about that before"--there were generally at least as many students who felt I was "making a mountain out of a molehill," or wasting time better spent talking about "cute" books for kids. Last quarter, instead of talking about the problem, I provided opportunities for students to discover it themselves. For example, we examined the controversy surrounding the book Words by Heart (Sebestyen, 1979), a recent recipient of the International Reading Association's "Best Book of the Year" award. The book is a white author's account of the efforts of a black family to overcome racism in an all-white town in Texas early in this century. Despite its receipt of the IRA award, the book was harshly criticized by Sim's (1980) and others in C.I.B.C.'s, Interracial Books for Children Bulletin for perpetuating "negative images and stereotypes" of blacks. How, my students asked, could critics disagree so profoundly about a book? We decided to explore the matter for ourselves and to arrive at our own conclusions.

By carefully reading this book and its many reviews, both positive and negative, and then reading a book with a similar setting and theme (Taylor's, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry) the students gained considerable insight into the subtle shadings of racism and came to appreciate the reasons why groups like C.I.B.C. are so insistent that their position be heard and accepted. I believe this personal investigation of a pressing and topical issue, enabled all of the students to gain a measure of understanding about a heretofore distant and difficult issue. I also found that concepts like "selective tradition" and the "political functions of culture" lost their hollow academic ring and took on real life meaning.

The lesson this experience taught me is simple. Just as we, following Piaget, urge our students to involve youngsters with concrete materials and experiences, we too must allow students to struggle and deal with the issues confronting them. Not all students can fully appreciate the problems of racism in children's books by being told about them. They must be allowed to read, write, talk, and thereby grapple with their own preconceptions and prejudices. Only through the process of exploration and discovery can the practical, everyday significance of our theoretical concerns become real to them. Such "discovered" understanding is an essential prerequisite to actions designed to change both the quality of life in classrooms and the society at large.

In closing, I must admit that what I have said here is not new, let alone radical. To some it will sound like so much recycled liberal consciousness raising, and this may well be true though I like to think my definition of the problems, and some of the solutions I present, go beyond those generally offered. In any event, it is a beginning and we must begin somewhere, musn't we?

Notes

(1) See, for example, Apple (1979, pp. 105-122) for a discussion of the utilization of systems management approaches in education. See also Franklin's (1974) study dealing with curriculum field's uncritical adaption of theories of social control from sociology.

(2) On this important point Apple (1979) noted that "the rigidly controlled nature of a number of modern societies bears little relation to the uniquely cogent analyses found in the Marxist tradition itself" (p. 131). In a similar vein, Avineri (1968) remarked that "It seems a truism, yet is repeatedly overlooked, that Marx's political theory should not be judged by Lenin's or Stalin's policies any more than Mill should be judged by Gladstone's performance (p. vi).

(3) Ollman (1975, pp. 3-43) offers an excellent discussion of relational analysis.

(4) Sharp & Greene (1975) offer an important discussion of the limitations of phenomenologically based research. Whitty (1974) also addressed this crucial issue when he stated that:

> The overemphasis on the notion that reality is socially constructed seems to have led to a neglect of the consideration of how and why reality comes to be constructed in particular ways and how and why particular constructions of reality seem to have the power to resist subversion (p. 125).

(5) See, for example, Barrett et al., (1979), Plotke (1980, 1981), and Williams (1977) for discussions dealing with this issue in regard to general cultural theory, politics, and literature respectively.

(6) See Feinberg's (1975) excellent critique of these assumptions.

(7) For more on the issue of "cultural deprivation," see Baratz & Baratz (1970) and Keddie (1973).

(8) See, for example, Apple (1979) and MacDonald (1977).

(9) I have discussed these points at greater length in a forthcoming article (Taxel, in press). The one book in my sample to present the Revolution from the black perspective was written by Edwards (1973). This book is unfortunately already out of print, a fact that lends still further support to belief in the existence of a selective tradition.

(10) See, for example, Apple (1978, 1980) and Taxel (1980, pp. 172-265).

(11) These issues are discussed at length in Barrett et al., (1979).

(12) A considerable amount of recent discussion has been in regard to such notions as the "partial" or "limited" autonomy of art, culture, and politics. Both Apple (1979) and myself (Taxel, 1980) have advocated this position. Plotke (1980, 1981), however, suggests that such notions are inadequate.

(13) Apple and I have recently completed a piece that attempts to present some of these issues to preservice teachers. See, Apple and Taxel (in press).

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